NATIONALISM AND THE CANADIAN UNIVERSITY

by Henry Beissel

One's most immediate response to the idea of introducing nationalist criteria into the operations of our universities is negative. We all share some notion that universities are concerned with 'eternal human verities': the pursuit of truth and knowledge, after all, is universal. Even on reflection one might legitimately wonder what relevance citizenship has to the hiring of university faculty, or nationality to the curricula and the teaching of the Arts and Sciences. Indeed, many academics declare that both are irrelevant and that the only true criterion is excellence -- and excellence (they claim) is ~~of course~~ more or less international, global, well-nigh absolute.

Unfortunately many of my internationally minded colleagues, it seems, stop thinking at this juncture. Otherwise they would have asked themselves how it is that, if nationalism has no place in the university, all major countries in the Western world have legislation, built into immigration laws or labour codes or employment policies, to control the hiring of foreign staff, and that, consequently, the universities in these countries do not employ any significant number of foreign nationals. An important part of the answer is, I contend, that most civilized nations have recognized the crucial function of their universities in perpetuating and expanding, by critical analysis, interpretation and exploration, the values and traditions of their community. In other words, our liberal internationalists are labouring under grave misapprehensions about nationalism, academic excellence, and the 'eternal human verities'. Unless we clear our minds of the scholar's absolutism, Canada will soon have no more national identity than the State of Ohio.

It has been fashionable among intellectuals, parrotting McLuhan's epitome of the 'global village', to avow that nationalism is passé, a 19th-century phenomenon taken seriously only by reactionaries. If our intellectuals really lived in a 'global village' ~~with~~ villagers being notoriously well informed about the realities in each others' houses and lives, ~~and~~ they would,

realize, instead of championing ill-informed pseudo-avantgardisms, that we have only just entered the age of nationalism. What they describe as 'nationalism', and belonging to the 19th century, is in reality imperialism -- a chauvinist megalomania bent on territorial and commercial expansion, usually accompanied by delusions of messianic grandeur. Soviet Russia and the United States, each in her own way, are perhaps the most prominent last bastions of that kind of chauvinism, still powerful, but (I hope) in the process of being eclipsed, because historically passé.

If 19th-century imperialist nationalism is passing, it is because of the emergence of a new kind of nationalism, one who does not seek to occupy other countries but occupies himself with the internal affairs of his own country, one who does not wish to take over foreign industries and manipulate other nations' economies but insists on controlling his own economy and working out the destiny of his own people, one who is not obsessed with his own superiority and determined to impose his way and philosophy of life on others but who knows in the marrow of his bones that his own nation is different and unique, like other nations, neither better nor worse, and who struggles for the freedom to make that unique difference manifest culturally, politically, economically, socially in the life of his nation, without ever losing sight of his solidarity with all men. This new spirit of national individualism is in evidence in all parts of the world today, wherever there is a community of people with a distinctive history, language, tradition, faith. It has arisen as a protest not only against the paternalism or even downright colonialism of the super-powers and their imitators, but also, and more crucially, against the technological forces in the modern world which threaten to homogenize all civilization. The new nationalism is an important and healthy check on ruthless globalism, and it may be the only way to prevent the world from dehumanizing itself à la Orwell's 1984. Inter-nationalism can exist meaningfully only inter nationes, i.e. among nations who associate freely, as equals, and with mutual respect.

In Canada too the new nationalism is flexing its muscles. One of its manifestations is Québec separatism, and on this issue the historical currents have left Canada only the choice between a new confederation, freely entered into by English-Canada on one side and Québec on the other, a partnership of equals, and an autonomous Québec Republic, probably followed by the disintegration of the rest of the country. This is a question we must settle amongst ourselves.

For Canada as a whole it is inevitable, given our special historical and geographical circumstances, that the new nationalism should be defensive against the U.S., that flamboyant brother of ours who made it big and who has been patronizing us ever since. 66% of our total economy is U.S.-owned; in our vital industries the figure is above 90%. Economic control means political power. Thus U.S.authority filters into our social order and into our daily lives. Add the impact of U.S. radio and TV, magazines, textbooks and publishing generally, and now the influx of U.S.professors -- is it not reasonable,in view of all this, to be concerned over the survival of a Canadian culture and nation? This has nothing to do with whether we like or dislike the American way of life: to some extent we are all involved in it. The question is simply whether or not, for better or worse, we wish to be ourselves, Canadians, a nation intent on bringing to fruition its own distinctive character and sensibilities, thus to enrich the life and history of the family of nations. If we do ~~xxxxxx~~ we must tackle the problem on all fronts -- in the whole economy, the media, trade unions and textbooks, our water and energy resources, in the universities.

If my argument on the new nationalism stands, and if we do decide to be Canadians, then it is easy to see that our institutions of learning and professional training centres are ~~central~~ paramount in transmitting our own values and perspectives, and that a predominance of teachers and students with Canadian citizenship is essential. I am equating citizenship with a real commitment to the country. Admittedly this does not go without saying, but citizenship is still the best way of evaluating the seriousness of anyone's national commitment, and the many professors, especially from the U.S., who anxiously retain their native passports prove the point.

What I am concerned about in our universities today is not so much Canadian content. ~~that~~ is coming along ~~mostly~~ in response to student demands, though it is still a serious problem in some areas. Canadian literature, for example, is being shamefully neglected right across the country. The preponderance of U.S. and U.K. professors in our English departments is one reason for this. The argument usually is that our own literature cannot match the excellence of the great and immortal British and U.S. literatures. The argument is rarely contradicted, though it is patently false. If we were to teach only what is 'great and immortal', at

least half of British and certainly three quarters of U.S. literature would have to be discarded, and we would teach Dostoevsky in place of William Styron, and Thomas Mann instead of Evelyn Waugh. Perhaps that is what we should be doing. But I don't think so. Part of the function of any national literature is to help the community from which it arose understand itself, by articulating its innermost drives, impulses, frustrations, by projecting the reality of its conduct and its conflicts, by delineating the dimensions of its quest. In the process of thus examining the social order and the psyche literature helps give meaning and direction to the life and times of the community as a whole. Canadian literatures does that for Canadians and that is why it should be taught at Canadian schools and universities. And this teaching should not be relegated to 'Institutes of Canadian Studies', but it should be an essential and self-evident part of all English, French, and general literature programs. The existence of 'Institutes of Canadian Studies' are an insult to Canadians because they signify an acceptance of the extent to which we have been colonialized. Who has ever heard of an 'Institute of French Studies' in France? Or how about an 'Institute of Russian Studies' in Russia?

Perhaps stop talking about English lit under which our shipping lists falls Divided — British, US + Canadian

More important than Canadian content, or at least as important, are Canadian values and perspectives. The fact is that the 'eternal human verities' which universities are supposedly concerned with are so banal, and mostly biological, that they are best settled in a tavern or a whorehouse. What we study at university are the infinite interrelations of an infinite variety of phenomena in the world: flowers and machines, poems and diseases, laws, neutrons, treaties, minds, pumpkins and cave paintings -- ~~their actions and interactions~~, elusive often and contradictory, their nature and significance, shifting forever in the flow of time and relative to the physical and intellectual place of the observer. The assumption of universal objectivity on the part of some academics is just so much pomposity. It is true that we have agreed to find certain rules of logic useful, and in the natural sciences there are methods of research whose practical results have given them international validity. But even the sciences are subject to national perspectives, for they do not function in a vacuum. The areas and objects of particular research projects, for instance, are often directly and intricately related to the society in which they are carried on; so are the applications of particular scientific discoveries.

Neither the ballistic missile, nor napalm, nor the art of brain-washing were developed in Canada, not because we are a more moral nation that the Germans or the Russians, but we do not possess the aggressive and militant temperament of which they are a product.

I am not suggesting that taking out Canadian citizenship will change a man's temperament. But if it represents a serious commitment to the country it will change his perspectives. And perspectives are important, less important than in the natural sciences, but crucial in the arts where so much is subjective. Take history, for example. Since the past cannot be totally reconstructed (not that it would make much difference if it could be), you start with bits and pieces say of a particular period. If it is fairly recent history and your material has not already been rigorously and blindly decimated by chance, you must make your own selection from a mass of available material. That selection can only be guided by your own personal bias which, however educated and refined, remains a bias. Then you interpret the pieces you have chosen as evidence, i.e. you put them together like a jigsaw puzzle. But they were not pieces in a jigsaw puzzle, and if they fit it is because you have made them fit a picture you created from your values and perspectives and commitments, and that likely existed in your mind before you even started your research.

This is a somewhat simplified account of the work of a historian, but it is true in its essentials. I am not suggesting that because of this, historical research or the teaching of history are worthless. Quite on the contrary: everything depends on what kind of jigsaw puzzle we choose to make of the bits and pieces of our world, because by that puzzle we shall live, love, think, and die. There is not much room for objectivity in history, and it makes a significant difference whether a student is reared on a reading of history predicated on the values and assumptions of U.S. society or on those prevalent in Canada. The same is generally true of the other disciplines in the Arts.

The argument presupposes of course that there really are significant differences between the values and assumptions north and south of the 49th parallel. Those living to the south and crossing to the north of it usually find no real difference, whereas those living to the north and

crossing to the south of it usually do -- and that in itself is a significant difference, however one explains it. It goes well with the idea of divine appointment which informs U.S.politics and life, its notions of the goodness of natural man, the dream of creating the City of God between California and New York State and redeeming mankind. We Canadians do not hold such grandiose convictions. We are the product not of a revolution but of two emigrations, one from the motherland, the other from below the 49th parallel. We do not believe in the perfectibility of man, and life is for us an Odyssey rather than a quest for the Holy Grail. This difference is fundamental and informs every facet of our cultural, political and social existence. It makes us more conservative and more unadventurous than our southern neighbour, more dull perhaps and slow, but also more level-headed, more obstinate, and in our own smug way more humble. There is much debate and disagreement about the Canadian identity. As far as I am concerned, we have our identity, and unless we commit ourselves consciously to what we are, to our own strengths and weaknesses, our limitations and possibilities, we shall become, not Americans, but nobodies.

The creation of a reasonable proportion between Canadian and non-Canadian faculty at our universities is part of that commitment. The latest statistics show that 46% of our university staff is non-Canadian, and that is not a reasonable proportion. The problem presents a different face on different campuses and in different disciplines. Some of the departments particularly sensitive to national values and perspectives are almost 100% American: such is the case, for instance, in history at Loyola College and in political science at MacMaster University. At some campuses the Canadian character of the institution is buried under a preponderance of British professors; and the Québec universities are confronted with an invasion by teachers from France. If present hiring practices continue this situation will deteriorate further until it reaches the point of no return. There are some who think it has reached that point already.

Perhaps the most important cause that brought us to this pass was the explosive university expansion in the sixties which created a sudden demand for qualified teachers which our graduate schools were unable to meet. This emergency has passed during the last couple of years, except perhaps in a few specialized fields and for a few specific posts. By and

large our graduate departments are now capable of supplying enough qualified graduates to meet the demands of our universities, so much so that some of our Ph.D.'s have to make a living driving trucks or working in an insurance office while the positions for which we have trained them, at enormous cost to the taxpayer, go to foreign applicants. In 1969 we hired 3087 university teachers. According of official Manpower and Immigration estimates, 2398 or 77% of these were non-Canadians, 1040 coming from the U.S. and 500 from the U.K. This represents an overall increase of 10% in the hiring of foreigners over 1968. At this rate we shall be hiring only non-Canadians ~~only in~~ by 1972.

Meanwhile our Federal Government lures Americans and Englishmen here by offering them (as well as twelve other nations) a two-year income tax exemption just for coming here. This means that we actually spend millions of dollars annually to make ~~certain~~ non-Canadians financially more competitive in our own academic job-market than our own people whom we have spent hundreds of millions of dollars ~~are~~ preparing precisely for the positions we are promoting others to take. This is lunacy and should be stopped. The March symposium at OISE in Toronto on the "Canadianization of Post-Secondary Education" unanimously passed a resolution to that effect. Actually, the two-year income tax exemption is given on condition that the person applying intends to stay only two years in Canada, but no American or Englishman I know has ever failed to take advantage of it though ~~they~~ the had every intention of staying longer than two years. With their left hand they sign a declaration that they intend to stay two years only, while their right hand signs the contract for a permanent appointment. The least that can be said is that such conduct is immoral, and the government should be enjoined to take action to recover some of this money which was obtained under false pretenses and which has given an unfair advantage particularly to U.S. and U.K. citizens over Canadians applying for positions as Canadian universities.

The fact that by far the largest contingent, namely 44.4% of all non-Canadians hired in 1969, were from the U.S. has to do partly with physical propinquity, and partly with the fact that Americans, generally speaking, are more pushy than Canadians. Where they have moved into departments they have often proved to be Trojan horses opening the gates for a verit-

able flood of fellow-Americans, sometimes from the same state and college. It is all done under the awesome banner of 'academic excellence'. Much is made of this by those who wish to justify or rationalize their hiring practices. Excellence, we are told, must be the chief criterion for the hiring of academic staff. Unfortunately, excellence is not a criterion unless you have a criterion for excellence, and there lies the rub. Under U.S. influence and dominance we have come to accept U.S. criteria of excellence which measure by certificates of higher degrees, the Ph.D. in particular, and the publish-or-perish formula. These criteria do not correspond with our own traditions, and, what is worse, they do not guarantee or even document excellence. Any random sampling of American professors at any of our universities will show that there are good ones and bad ones, and an awful lot of mediocre ones in between -- much the same picture and proportions, probably, that one would find at any university anywhere. But how good it all looks on paper! Like the man the University of Victoria in B.C. hired for president a couple of years ago. A committee of 18 sedate academics, 17 of them Canadians, scoured the English-speaking world for the most excellent man and found him in the United States -- a man well accoutred with all the requisite higher degress of learning. Much to everyone's embarrassment, however, it turned out a year or so after he had been appointed that he had been awarded his prestigious LL.B. and his Doctor of Jurisprudence from a one-room one-man correspondence school in Chicago known for its sale of fake academic degrees.

The point is that paper criteria establish paper excellence, no more, and so long as we use American standards of excellence we shall go on hiring an increasing number of Americans.

No-one proposes that we should turn our universities into parochial schools where we talk to each other, but then no-one ever accuses Oxford or Harvard or the Sorbonne of being parochial just because they have an insignificantly small number of foreigners on their staff, a mere fraction of our own ~~numbers~~ percentages. A cosmopolitan climate at university is not created by a lot of foreign faculty but by the commitments and achievements of staff and students, and these must be firmly rooted in the society in which they teach, study, and work. If we don't take serious steps soon

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to ensure the Canadian character of our universities we shall indeed end up with parochial schools, because without a commitment to Canada we shall become the backyard of the United States, culturally irrelevant, politically emasculated, and economically depressed.

To ask that an overwhelming majority of our university staff be Canadian citizens does not mean to promote racial discrimination. Every landed immigrant is free, after his residence years, to be or not to be a Canadian. So are we, (whether native or naturalized) who hold Canadian passports already. We must make the choice and then live with the consequences.

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